

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3403

December 8, 2003

The Honorable Robert Zoellick
United States Trade Representative
600 Seventeenth Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

I write to invite you to come to the Red River Valley, which is the heart of sugar beet production in the region. I urge you to meet directly with North Dakota sugar beet growers, sugar beet factory workers, Main Street businessmen, and community leaders, who believe the current U.S. negotiating position on sugar could destroy this important industry.

As we discussed in our most recent meeting, the U.S. offer in the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) negotiations could lead to millions of tons of subsidized foreign imports swamping our domestic sugar market in just a few years, destroying the highly competitive U.S. sugar industry.

I am meeting today with sugar growers, sugar plant workers, and community leaders in Hillsboro. The economic future of these people, like many others in the Red River Valley, is directly tied to the fate of the sugar industry and the \$2 billion it contributes to the regional economy. As I meet with these hard working North Dakotans, it reconfirms for me the danger to their livelihoods of this negotiating strategy.

The Fargo Forum editorialized recently on this issue. The editorial asks: "We wonder why the government subsidized and inefficient sugar growers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua are more important to the Bush Administration than U.S. farmers in Minnesota, North Dakota, Florida, Louisiana, Idaho and Montana." I think that's an excellent question, and I urge you to come to North Dakota, meet face-to-face with those who will be affected by the CAFTA sugar provisions, and give them an answer. This would also be an opportunity for you discuss other trade issues affecting North Dakota agriculture, including unfairly traded Canadian grain – where we greatly appreciate your efforts – and border livestock issues of growing importance.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kent Conrad", is written over a horizontal line.

KENT CONRAD
United States Senate